



The Literature of Terror

The Roots of American Gothic Fiction

Lecturer: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt
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Room and Time: SR 34 D2 · Wed., 15:15-16:45
First session: March 12, 2014
Course number: SE 512.250

Course description: In how far have 18th and 19th century Gothic narratives shaped our individual and national anxieties about the dark aspects of life? In how far have representations of horror succeeded in encoding our fears of the unknown, the supernatural, the irrational? Since its early stages in the 18th century, Gothic tales have dealt with the hidden aspects of the human psyche: fears of victimization, of a threatening sexuality, a loss of identity, a merging of the boundaries between self and other, reason and madness, civilization and barbarism, good and evil.

Methods: This is an interactive course. Participation in group discussions as well as contributions to the discussion forum on the Moodle course site will be part of the final grade. Each meeting will be held by 'experts' who organize the session by means of questions, games, illustrations, video clips, and group work. The most relevant facts will be conveyed in a short information block (or, alternatively, a fact file on a handout). There is a **course reader** available at our Office (Attemsgasse 25, Mon-Fri, 9-12).

Aims: Giving an overview of chief texts of American Gothic literature from the beginnings until today (with references to their composition, background, and reception).

Assessment: Regular attendance; active in-class participation; presentation as part of an expert session with 3-page handout and 3 online questions; at least 8 entries in the discussion forum; research proposal of 2 and final paper of 10-12 pages.

Grading: 1/3 – Attendance, participation, and discussion entries; 1/3 – expert session; 1/3 – research proposal and final paper. Please note that you need a "4" ("Genügend") in each category in order to pass the course.

Uploads: All experts will make their three online questions available 9 days *before* the session. PowerPoint presentations and handouts must be made available within 1 week *after* the session. Please send all documents to our student assistant Sarah Weigl at s.weigl@edu.uni-graz.at.

Syllabus

- Mar. 12** **Introduction – "T'is so appalling it exhilarates"**
Basic texts (strongly recommended):
Teresa Goddu, "Introduction" to *Gothic America* (1997), 1-12.
Eric Savoy, "The Rise of American Gothic" (2002), 167-188.
- Mar. 19** **The Revolution and the Birth of the American Gothic – Charles Brockden Brown**
Main text (required):
Charles Brockden Brown, excerpts from *Edgar Huntly* (1799).
Keywords: Indians, Landscape, Massacre, Revolution, Superstition.
- Mar. 26** **Gothic Romance – Edgar Allan Poe**
Main text (required):
Edgar Allan Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1838).
Keywords: 'Buried Alive', Decadence, Freud, Haunted House.



Apr. 2 **The Horrors of Slavery – William Wells Brown**
Main text (required):
William Wells Brown, excerpts from *Clotel* (1853).
Keywords: Auctions, Mulatto, Slavery, Torture.



Apr. 9 **Gothic Poetry – Emily Dickinson**
Basic Texts (required):
Emily Dickinson, “I heard a fly buzz” (posthum. 1896),
“There’s a certain slant of light” (1890), “Much Madness is divinest Sense” (1955)
Keywords: Death, Eccentricity, Immortality, Loneliness, Mount Holyoke.

May 7 **Female Gothic – Charlotte Perkins Gilman**
Main text (required):
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1890).
Keywords: Emancipation, Imprisonment, Madness, Marriage, Rest Cure, Separate Spheres.

May 14 **Fear and the Supernatural – H.P. Lovecraft**
Main text (required):
H.P. Lovecraft, “The Rats in the Wall” (1924).
Keywords: Cosmic Horror, England, Jung, Poe, *Weird Tales*.

May 21 **Southern Gothic**
Main text (required):
William Faulkner, “A Rose for Emily” (1930).
Keywords: Community, Corpse, Love, Old South, New South.

May 28 **Gothic Popular Culture – Eerie Comics**
Main Texts (required):
Selected stories from *Eerie Comics* (1947 & 1951).
Keywords: *Eerie Comics*, Gender, Pop Culture, Postwar Era.



June 4 **Independent Study Unit**

June 11 **Gothic Fiction and the ‘Other’ – Shirley Jackson**
Main text (required):
Shirley Jackson, “The Summer People” (1957).
Keywords: Buildings, City vs. Countryside, Otherness, Subtle Horror.

– Deadline for research proposal –

June 18 **The Return of the ‘Id’ – Stephen King**
Main text (required):
Stephen King, “The Boogeyman” (1973).
Keywords: Evil, Mask, Murder, Psychoanalysis.

June 25 **Postcolonial Gothic – Toni Morrison**
Main text (required):
Toni Morrison, excerpts from *Beloved* (1987).
Keywords: Haunted House, Mother-Daughter, Race, Slavery, ‘Sweet Home’, Whipping.

July 2 **Romance and Vampire Fiction – Stephenie Meyer**
Main text (required):
Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight* (2005).
Keywords: Eros-Thanatos, Romance, Vampires

– Deadline for the final paper –

